

CHAPTER - 2

R A G A : A N I N S I G H T  
T H R O U G H S O M E  
A N C I E N T T R E A T I S E S  
O N M U S I C

### **RĀGA : AN INSIGHT THROUGH SOME TREATISES ON MUSIC**

Indian music is probably as old as the Vēdas\*. If not in its later elaborate form, certainly in a rudimentary form, it seems to have existed in the distant past. In the early extant treatises on music, there are descriptions of music but these tend to be distinguished by vagueness or fanciful attributions of origins. Recent writers on rāga have often quoted from these, but without being able to sound quite confident about the substantial value of such material. Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavatar, one of the great composers and exponents of Karnāṭak music in recent times, quotes two definitions (more properly, descriptions) of rāgas to this effect: "The refined sound" Ornamented by svara and varṇa and giving pleasure to people is called rāga." He further quotes one of the time-honoured myths relating to the origin of music. The text assumes that the system of music that it talks of is the origin of all music. "The rāgas appeared as a result of the union of Śiva and Śakti. From Śiva's face called Sadyojātam came Śri Rāga, from the face called Vāmadevam came the raga Vasanta, from

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\* "ṛgbhihi pattyamabhūt gītam samabhyaha samapadyata Yajubhyō abhinaya jātam rasasca atharvanaha smṛtaha" (Prose emanated from the Rg Vēda, music from the Sāma Vēda, miming (abhinaya) from the Yajur Vēda and the emotions (rasa) from the Atharva Vēda.) Sangītadarpaṇa, quoted by Dr. L. Muthiah Bhagavatar in his Sangīta Kalpadrumam, Part I, published by Sri Swathi Thirunal Music Academy, Trivandrum.

the face called Aghōram came the raga Bhairavam; from the face Tatpurusham came the Pañcama rāga, and from the Īśāna the Megha rāga, when He danced the Taṇḍavanṛttam. From the face of Pārvati came the rāga called Nattanārāyaṇam when She performed lāśyanruttam." According to another account, says the author, the cowherdesses in the entourage of Sri Krishna each sang a rāga and thus sixteen thousand ragas came into being, out of which only thirty-six became well known in the world, and even these are getting reduced as the years go.

Such statements serve to emphasise the myth-making and a historical attitudes ubiquitous in our ancient works. It must be understood that the extant music systems of India are not fossilised versions. Each system of Indian music seems to have developed according to its situations and when we try to relate the ancient works on music with today's practice and prevalent theory, we encounter many difficulties.

Any grammar arises out of the need to formulate existing practices. We may therefore take it that the ancient works on the grammar of music tried to codify the music that existed in their times. But the prevalent music theories of our music of today came into existence only around the sixteenth century.

Reading ancient texts on music, one does not come across any clear picture of the rāga or the way in which it

develops to assume a personality of its own. Much less is one able to get any idea of how to teach the concept of raga, how to evolve a methodology of identifiably developing a raga in its abstract form--except in so far as it consists in the conventional combinations--permutations and combinations of the svara-s or svarasthāna-s marking the territories of the rāga.

It seems tenable to say that there is no absolute continuity between ancient musicology and present day musicology. It is difficult to visualise the way in which rāga-s were derived or sung. It is generally assumed that treatises on music after the sixteenth century have a bearing on contemporary music, or serve as a link to continuity of tradition. It is also believed that it is possible to trace the historic evolution of music to the contemporary stage through these works. Yet one has to confess that interesting as the study of these treatises is, it does not lead to the perception of any relationship to contemporary music. And it is difficult to form an idea of the music system that prevailed in the days of these treatises.

The Chapters on rāga and mēla in a few of the well-known medieval treatises on music--the Caturdaṇḍi Prakāśika, the Svaramēlakalānidhi, the Saṅgīta Sarāmrta and the Rāgalakṣaṇa manuscripts of Śaḥa Maharaja are summed up here,

with special reference to the rāga-s that have been taken up analysis in the present thesis. For comparison amongst the works discussed, the Rāga Sāveri has been cited as example.

#### A. Caturdaṇḍi Prakāśika

This treatise by Vēṅkaṭamakhi is supposed to belong to the first half of the seventeenth century. It proposes very elaborate systematising of the rāga-s. The seventy two mēla scheme suggested by him has been in wide use in South India. It seems fair to say that Vēṅkaṭamakhi's system is a masterly exposition of possibilities.

Vēṅkaṭamakhi says that the following nineteen mēla-s were in vogue in his time. Simhārava is, however, said to be his creation.

Mukhāri, Samavarāli, Bhūpaḷa, Hejjuji, Vasantabhairavi, Gauḷa, Bhairavi, Āhari, Śrīrāga, Kāmbhōji, Śaṅkarābharanam, Sāmanta, Deśakṣi, Nāṭa, Śuddhavarāli, Pantūvarāli, Śuddharāmakriya, Simhārava and Kalyāṇi.

Vēṅkaṭamakhi gives the śruti configurations and svarasthāna-s of these nineteen mēla-s, giving their parallels in his 72 mēla scheme. Given below is his description of the Bhairavi-mela.

Svara-sthāna-s: Ṣaḍja, pañcaśruti ṛṣabha, Sādharaṇa

gāndhāra, Śuddha madhyama, Śuddha Pañcama, Śuddha dhaivata and Kaiśiki Niṣāda.

Śruti-s: sa--3 ri--5 ga--1 ma--3 pa-4 dha--3 ni--3.

Vēṅkaṭamakhi says that this is the twentieth mela in his seventy-two mēla scheme.

Coming to the Rāga Chapter, we find a discussion on the ten rāgalakṣaṇa-s and rāga-s as classified by Bharata. "I will now expound, in order, those rāga-s with the above mentioned lakṣaṇa-s," he begins (Verse 16, Rāga Prakaraṇa).

"Rāga-s are of ten types (according to Bharata and others) :Grāma rāga-s, Upa rāga-s, Rāga-s, Bhaṣa, Vibhāṣa-s, Antarabhāṣa-s, Rāgāṅga-s, Bhāṣāṅga-s, Kriyāṅga-s and Upāṅga-s. The first six are mārḡa rāga-s, but they exist only in the world of Gāndharva-s. Only Rāgāṅga-s, Bhāṣāṅga-s, Kriyāṅga-s and Upāṅga-s are Deśīya rāga-s."

"Śārṅgadēva in his Ratnākara mentions 264 rāga-s. Those rāga-s are obsolete now, (Verse 23, Rāga Prakaraṇa) in accordance with contemporary practice and as recognised by my Guru Danappariya."

"As the music is Dēśī, I have not explained all the lakṣaṇa-s for all rāga-s, but will explain practically, and according to the grammar of music" (Verses 23-27).

Vēṅkaṭamakhi describes the rāga-s in the order of Graha, amśa, Nyāsa svāra-s taken by them (the rāga-s),

starting from Ṣadja.

He states that he is going to explain the lakṣaṇa practically--in accordance with gāna lakṣaṇa. But he seems to retain the terms he has used in relation to the Mārgi music system which is not prevalent among human beings. The relevance of ancient terms to the then contemporary music is not very clear.

EXAMPLES OF SOME MĒLAS AS EXPOUNDED BY VĒNKATAMAKHI

Name of Rāga/ Mēla	Svarasthāna-s	Śruti intervals	Number in 72- Mēla scheme
(1) Mukhāri	All seven śuddha swara-s	sa, pa-- 4 ni, ga-- 2 ri, dha--3	1
(2) Gauḷa	Ṣaḍja, śuddha ṛṣabha Antara Gāndhāra śuddha Madhyama Pañcama, Dhaivata Kākaliniṣāda	sa, ma-- 1  ri, dha- 3 ga, ni-- 5 pa-- 4	15
(3) Bhairavi	Pañcaśrutirṣabha Sādhāraṇa gāndhāra śuddha ma, Pa, śuddha dha, Kaiśiki ni,	ri--5 ga--1 pa--4 sa,ma,dha,ni--1	20
(4) Kāmbhōji	Ṣaḍja, Pañcaśruti ṛṣabha, Antara Gāndhāra, śuddha madhyama, śuddha Pañcama, Pañca śruti dhaivata Kaiśiki niṣāda	sa, ga-- 3 ri, dha--5 ma,ni--1 pa--4	28
(5) Śaṅkarā- bharaṇam	Sa, Pañcaśruti ri Antaraga, śuddha madhyama & Pa Pañcaśruti dha Kākali ni	sa, ma-- 1 ri, dha--5 ga, ni --3 pa-- 4	29
(6) śuddha Varālī	Varālī ma, and Kākali niṣāda, rest śuddha svara-s	sa, pa-- 1 ri, dha--3 ga, ni-- 2 ma -- 7 ni-- 5	39
(7) Pantuvarālī Rāga & Mēla	Sa, śuddha ri Sādhāraṇa ga, Varālī ma, śuddha Pa & dha Kākali niṣāda	sa, pa-- 1 ri, ga, dha--3 ma--6 ni--5	45



Name of Rāga/ Mēla	Svarasthāna-s	Śruti intervals	Number in 72- Mela scheme
(8) Kalyāṇi	sa, Pañcaśruti ṛṣabha Āntara ga, Varāḷi ma, Śuddha Pa, Pañcaśruti dha, Kākali ni	sa, pa-- 1 ri,dha--5 ga,ni--3 ma--4	65

In studying these, one comes up with a few questions. Were all mēla descriptions true of rāga-s? If so, why is the Vādi-Samvādi factor missing here but mentioned for other Janya-s in Rāga Prakaraṇa? Some mēla-s have been called rāga-s (even in mēla Prakaraṇa), while the rest have been called only mēla-s.

Examples:

1. Bhairavi, Śrī rāga .
2. Deśākṣi, Nāṭa
3. Pantūvarāḷi (mēla & rāga) [.... Śaḍja ... From the above svara-s originated the mēla and rāga Pantūvarāḷi (158-191, Rāga adhyaya P.62)].

In many instances sa and pa have been prefixed 'śuddha'. Why so? Was it just for the sake of verse/meter?

**Description of rāga-s**  
**Some examples from the treatise**

**I] Rāga-s with Ṣaḍja as Nyāsa, Graha and Amsā**

Name of rāga	Characteristics	Vādi-Samvādi etc.	Time
(1) Saurasṭram Sampūrṇa		sa- Vādi ma, pa-Samvādi ni-Anuvādi ri, dha-vivādi	All times
(2) Kāmbhoji	Sampūrṇa, but ga, ni, varja in Arōhaṇa		Sung in evenings by Maestros
(3) Mukhāri	Sampūrṇa	sa-vādi Pa- Samvādi ga, ni- Vivādi ri, dha - Anuvādi	All times
(4) Devagāndhari of Śrirāga mēla	Sampūrṇa		Morning
(5) Śāma of Saṅkarā- bharāṇa	Sampūrṇa (Embellished with mandra sthāyi madhyama)		All times

**II] Rāga-s with Pañcama Nyāsa, Graha & Amsā**

Name of rāga	Characteristics	Vādi-Samvādi etc.	Time
Sāveri of Gaula	ga, ni, varja in Arōhaṇa		Morning by maestros

#### IIII Dhaivata as Nyāsa, Graha & Aśa

Name of rāga	Characteristics	Vādi-Samvādi etc.	Time
Bhairavi	Upāṅga	Sa--Vādi Pa-Samvādi ni, ga--Vivādi ri, dha-- Anuvādi	Evening

#### IVl Rāga-s with Nisāda as Nyāsa, Graha & Aśa

Name of rāga	Characteristics	Vādi-Samvādi etc.	Time
1 Kedāragaulai of Kāmbhojī mela	Sampūrṇa--bestows rakti (according to Bharata and others) Upāṅga		
2 Ritigaulai of Bhairavi mela	Sampūrṇa		Evening

Dēśi rāga-s like Kalyāṇi are innumerable. They are never suited for Gīta, Laya or Prabandha.

Name of rāga	Characteristics
1 Kalyāṇi	Sampūrṇa. ma, ni varja in Arōhaṇa. Unsuited for gīta rāga Prabandha but pleases.
2 Pantūvarāli	Sampūrṇa. Most unsuited for gīta, Prabandha (favourite of the vulgar)

Since Dēśi rāga-s are said to be innumerable and mixed

in nature their lakṣaṇa-s are not elucidated here.

In ālāpaprakaraṇa, Vēṅkaṭamakhi expounds the "ālāpana" pertaining to rāga-s. But he explains only a few terms like Akṣiptika, Rāgavardhini (Karaṇa), Mukṭāya (Vidāri), etc.,

Vēṅkaṭamakhi elaborates the technique of rāga elaboration (based on different ranges within the rāga). All these might have been descriptive of contemporary realities and might have had relevance then. But these terms are obsolete now.

**Note:** In this chapter, the seven svara-s have been represented in many contexts as sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha and ni, uniformly in all works mentioned and the small letters used are not indicative of any particular svarasthāna (as in other chapters of this thesis).

In Sañcāra-s, the svara-s are represented s r g m p d n. The elongation of a svara is indicated by ' , '.

#### **B The Saṅgīta Sārāṁṛta of Tuḷaja**

Rāja Tuḷajāji belonged to the Marāṭha dynasty that ruled over Tanjore. This work is said to belong to the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. Tuḷajāji quotes ancient authorities like Bharata and Maṭaṅga. He enumerates nineteen mēḷa-s, though he recognises the 72-mēḷa scheme of Vēṅkaṭamakhi. The following are the nineteen mēḷa-s he speaks of:

Śrī Rāga, Nāṭṭa, Mālavagaula, Vēlāvaḷi, Varāḷi,  
 Śuddharāmakriya, Śaṅkarābharanam, Kāmbhōji,  
 Bhairavi, Mukhāri, Vēgavāhini, Sindurāmakriya,  
 Hejūjji, Sāmavarāḷi, Vasanta Bhairavi,  
 Bhinnaṣadja, Deśākṣi, Chāyānāṭṭa, Sāraṅgā.

Harold S. Powers in his survey of musical treatises of medieval and modern times has this to say of the specific contribution of this work:

"The original part of the Sangita Saramrta is the raga chapter, in which the author gives many musical examples from the ragas of his time. These begin to bear considerable resemblance to the raga-forms as we know them today, as far as the usual skeletal letter notation can reveal any study of the musical background from which the present repertoire originated would have to include this particular chapter as an essential source.\*"

Given below is a description of Sāvēri rāga by Tulaja.

	Svarasthana-s	Time
Sāvēri of Mālavagaula mēla	Śuddha Sa, ma, pa ri, dha, Antara gāndhāra, Kākali niṣāda.ga, ni langana in Arōhaṇa. Straight progression in Avarōhaṇa	Morning

\*Harold.S.Powers. The Back Ground of the South-Indian Raga System p.47

Prayōga in ālāpa:

d s r m g r p d d n d p m  
p d s n d s n d p m, r s r g r  
s n d s, s,

The author gives not only examples of sañcāra-s but also gives thāya, Gīta, Sūlādi, etc.,

The following are the svara names he uses:

Ṣaḍja  
Śuddha ṛṣabha  
Pañcaśruti ṛṣabha (Śuddha gāndhāra)  
Sadhāraṇa Gāndhāra (Ṣaṭśruti ṛṣabha)  
Antara Gāndhāra  
Śuddha madhyama  
Vikṛta Pañcamamadhyama  
Śuddha Pañcama  
Śuddha Dhaivata  
Pañcaśruti dhaivata (Suddha niṣāda)  
Kaiśiki niṣāda (Ṣaṭśruti dhaivata)  
Kākali niṣāda

Tuḷajāji says that the Svaramelakalānidhi calls his VikṛtaPañcama madhyama, Cyuta Pañcama madhyama, and that in Caturdaṇḍi Prakāśika as per lakṣya it is called Varāḷi madhyama. One is yet to decipher the reason for the differences in nomenclature.

### C The Rāgalakṣaṇa of Śāha Maharaja

This manuscript of King Śāha is perhaps unique in the sense that his approach to defining rāga-s seems to have been led only by the contemporary music (lakṣya). Earlier terms like Graha, Amśa and Nyāsa have not been used. Saṁcāra-s in compositions (viz., Sulādi, Gīta, Thāya and Ālāpa) are furnished. The approach is more lakṣya-oriented, with no mention of any ancient authors or even the 72-mēla scheme. "The svāra names used are, beside the seven Śuddha svāra-s): \*

Pañca śruti ri, Ṣaṭśruti ri, Sadhāraṇa ga, Antara ga, Cyuta madhyama ga, Cyutapañcama madhyama, Pañcaśruti dha, Ṣaṭśruti dha, Kaiśiki ni, Kākali ni and Cyuta sadja ni."

Twenty mēla-s are enumerated and 115 janya rāga-s (Sampūrṇa 87, Śāḍava 17 and Auḍava 11). Sampūrṇa means that the seven svāra-s figure in the rāga, not necessarily in a straight sequence--either in the Ārōhaṇa or in the Avarōhaṇa or in both.

Examples:  
Rāga Husēni

Sampūrṇa. Svāra-s in arōha and avarōha ascend and descend in a free manner.

Example: r g m, g r s / r g m p m n d n, s /  
n d p m p d m, g r s.

\* S.Seetha Rāgalakṣaṇamu of Śāha Maharaja .p. in her introduction p.ix

**Rāga Sāvēri (of Maḷavagauḷa mēla)**

ga, ni eschewed in Ārōhana. Avarōhana has a neat progression of svāra-s.

Example: d s r m g r m p dd n d p m /  
p d s n d S, / n d p m g r s /  
r g r r s n d s, s

But the author does not provide sthāyi dots.

Treatises on music are often called Lakṣaṇa Grantha-s. They are often true to their name, scarcely ever communicating any information on the prevalent version or Lakṣya. A major portion of most treatises consists of what has already been said by Bharata or Maṭaṅga. Commentaries on such works need not be mentioned specially. This tradition of quoting authorities or explaining concepts such as the 22 sruti-s, grāma mūrchanā, etc., becomes a great handicap to any one who wants to say something new, even by way of expressing a doubt. He is mistaken to be an irreverent iconoclast. It is this practice of reverential repetition that makes Harold S. Powers say this:

"By the sixteenth century most of the terminology used in the older treatises on music had lost its meaning for the South Indian writers on theory. Large portions of the Nāṭyaśāstra and Sāṅgīta Ratnākara (particularly the latter), as well as passages from their commentators are quoted or



paraphrased in the works written after 1550, but the writers of the later texts obviously do not really understand the material they quote, and insert it out of respect for authority."\*

Even in giving rāgalakṣana-s, most works deal with this aspect on the same lines as their predecessors. The concept of raga had been well established, with no attempt to document it. The music has been passed on by oral tradition, and learning music has also been more due to empirical knowledge than to analytical methods. If treatises had really some contemporary idea to communicate, they would have been learnt by performers. It is intriguing as to how the art of performing or practical music has grown with performers remaining totally ignorant of the texts and their theories. Should we take it that performance was only an applied area and theory was a science? To sing or understand Bhairavi, one does not require any term or definition like Graha, Amśa or Vardhini, Sthāya etc.,. Even very recent works like Prof. Sambamoorthy's retain the same terminology with no practical relevance. As a result, lakṣaṇa grantha-s fail to educate or communicate to today's students of Karnatak music and they have nothing enlightening to offer to the already initiated.

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\*Harold.S.Powers. The Back-ground of the South-Indian Raga System p.6.

Treatises offer examples from Prabandha, Sulādi, thāya, etc.,. These forms seem to be obsolete now, and they mean nothing to today's student.

It is paradoxical that we should have so many texts dealing with musicology but so little of ancient music that can be reconstructed. One of the deadly factors responsible for this is the absence of a proper notation.

"When notation is lacking altogether or completely inadequate, as in India, there can be no real reconstruction of any sort of music which has died out. Whatever holdovers from an earlier style may be presumed to exist are usually impossible to separate from the body of current known traditional music for the purpose of comparison with descriptions in ancient manuscripts." \*

Therefore it seems rather beside the point to try to guess from mysterious theoretical writings and scanty archaeological evidence what music in ancient India might have been like or what historical relationships it may have

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\*Harold.S.Powers.The Back - Ground Of South-Indian Raga System: p.4 and 5.

had with other ancient musics. This is an endlessly fascinating topic for speculation. Yet there is so much of interest to be learnt from the music of which we do have a living record that it seems more profitable to enquire first into the workings of contemporary traditional art music.